

## Garden Expressions

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Instead of going to the lake to relax, Bob and Margaret Simmet of Stillwater, Minn., decided to bring nature to their home. They hired Bruce Johnson, co-owner of Garden Expressions in Lakeville, Minn., to design the water feature as part of a larger project, including a sport court, deck, pool and pool house.

When designing this project, Johnson took his inspiration from the Frank Lloyd Wright home Fallingwater. "He put the house in the middle of a waterfall so that one is forced to interact with nature instead of just looking at it," Johnson said. As desired, the completed water feature brought the sight, sound and smell of water to the client's home.

With the Simmet's approval, Johnson and his five-member team used a Bobcat 331 compact excavator with a scissors clamp to excavate the property and set the larger boulders. Then they lifted each boulder, placed the underlayment and liner, and reset the boulders. A few of the boulders proved too heavy to lift with the excavator, so they slid them in with planks and a Bobcat 773 skid loader.

Johnson said he seeks to make each project that he designs look natural. "You look at nature, and you see natural breaks in the water," Johnson said. "The part [people] like most is the curving, back-and-forth movement of the water. If you just dig a hole in the back yard and add water, it doesn't look like nature. Instead of putting a water feature in the corner of the yard, think about what the water means to [the client]. [People] want something bigger than themselves, and that's something water creates."

Johnson and his team try to anticipate how each boulder will interact with the water, he said. Often the water flow will take on a life of its own, he said, and establishing intermittent pools in which the water can slow down creates a relaxed, peaceful setting. As desired, the completed water feature brought the sight, sound and smell of water to the client's home.

Weather was a big factor on this job, with the first two weeks being very hot and dry, followed by several days of rain that made the site a mud hole. The real challenges, however, occurred at the design level, Johnson said. "The tying-it-all-together was hard. We had to make it look realistic. The magic of a water feature is that it looks like a creek with the mystique of 'Where does it start?' and 'Where does it lead to?'"

The final product includes a large lower pond and three smaller ponds with a total of 7,000 gallons of water. The lower pond measures about 30 feet by 20 feet and is designed in a very irregular shape that includes an island. The total length from start to finish measures nearly 90 feet. The designer enabled the clients to interact with nature, not just look at it.

Johnson and his team collaborated with builders to create as many viewing spots as possible, including from several rooms in the house, deck, patios, bridge, sitting rocks, pool, sport court and the three-season porch.

The water feature is stocked with about 10 fish and contains waterlilies, water irises and hyacinths. In the end, Johnson said he and his team accomplished their goal of bringing nature to the Simmets' back yard.

\* All photos courtesy of Garden Expressions

### SPECIFICATIONS:

Designer: Bruce Johnson, co-owner of Garden Expressions

Installer: Peter Larson, co-owner of Garden Expressions, and Rick Theis, a waterfall specialist in Stillwater, Minn.

Contact information: Garden Expressions, 952-898-2002, [www.gardenexp.com](http://www.gardenexp.com)

Project location: Stillwater, Minn.

**Construction:** The walk from the upper deck to the lower patios crosses over the stream twice. The source of the stream is hidden under a three-season porch. The skimmer is hidden behind the stair landing. Three small ponds and a large, lower pond contain a total of 7,000 gallons of water. The lower pond measures about 30 feet by 20 feet. It features an irregular shape and an island. From start to finish, the water feature's length is nearly 90 feet.

**Components:** The feature includes an Aqua-scape skimmer and biofalls supplemented with a Savio skimmer and 5,000-gph pump for a total of 9,600 gph.

**Time to complete:** The total project took 5.5 weeks, including construction of the patios, walkways, bridges and landscaping.

**Overall cost:** \$103,000